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AUTHOR	Grognet, Allene Guss
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ABSTRACT

This "Q & A" discusses how employment preparation can be integrated into English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) curriculum, whether in a workplace or standard adult ESL program. It first chronicles the historical link, since federal legislation in 1964, between employment and adult education and the relationship between employment and ESL instruction with the large influx of immigrants since the 1970s. The distinction between workforce and workplace instruction is discussed, noting trends in this area since the 1970s. Research on both linguistic skills and other workplace skills needed in the workplace is reviewed briefly, and five areas of workplace competency identified in a major federal report by the Secretary of Labor's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills (SCANS) are detailed: resource management; information management; social interaction; systems behavior and performance skills; and technology utilization. Ways in which ESL practitioners can teach the SCANS skills are discussed briefly, and other ways in which they can advance workplace ESL instruction are noted. Contains 33 references. (MSE) (Adjunct ERIC Clearinghouse on Literacy Education)

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Integrating Employment Skills into Adult ESL Instruction

by Allene Guss Grognet
Center for Applied Linguistics

This *Q & A* discusses how employment preparation can be integrated into the English as a second language (ESL) curriculum, whether in a workplace or a standard adult ESL program. It looks briefly at the history of employment-related ESL; describes the skills needed to get a job, to survive on the job, and to thrive on the job; suggests classroom activities to promote these skills; and touches on future directions for the field.

What is the Historical Link Between Employment and Adult Education?

In the United States, the federal role in adult education was created in 1964 under the Economic Opportunity Act. Under title II-B of the act, the Adult Education Program was established in which instruction in reading and writing English was an allowable option, i.e. a choice, for states. Two years later, in 1966, Congress enacted the Adult Education Act (AEA) which expanded the program to allow services to those with limited English speaking proficiency (U.S. Department of Education, 1991).

According to Moore and Stavrianos (1994), the AEA was established to enact adult education programs that would:

> enable adults to acquire the basic educational skills necessary for literate functioning; provide adults with sufficient basic education to enable them to benefit from job training and retraining programs, and obtain and retain productive employment so that they might more fully enjoy the benefits of citizenship; [and] enable adults to continue their education to at least the level of completion of secondary school. (p. 4)

As the field of adult education grew over the next 30 years, the three most common programs were ABE (for learners with literacy skills below the eighth grade level); GED (designed to prepare students to obtain a high school equivalency certificate); and ESL (services for limited-English-speaking adults). But for many years, job training and retraining, as an essential part of the act, received little emphasis.

In the national elections of 1994, the composition of the U.S. Congress changed. Since then, there have been efforts to cut, combine, and streamline federal programs. In the process, the link between education and job training and retraining has been confirmed. In April 1997, the House Committee on Education and the Workforce approved a bill that would "consolidate more than 60 employment, job-training, and adult education programs into three block grants for the states: an adult employment and training grant, a youth employment and training grant, and an adult education and family literacy grant" (United House Education Committee, 1997, p. 67). It is expected that this bill, or one similar to it, will be signed into law, strengthening the connection between employment and education.

What were Early Links Between Employment and ESL?

In the 1970s, a growing number of guest workers in west European countries prompted British educators (Jupp & Hodlin, 1975; Wilkens, 1976; & Widdowson, 1978) to reevaluate the current approach to teaching English as a second language. In 1975, Jupp & Hodlin's *Industrial English* was published, reflecting the authors' experience of the previous five years working with Asian immigrants who had settled in Britain. The book asked the question, "How adequate is orthodox language teaching theory [which was based on the use of audiolingual and grammar translation approaches] to the communicative tasks of our guest worker?" (p. 5). This text started the field toward building a theory of workplace/workforce instruction. Drawing from developments in the field of linguistics, cognitive psychology, adult education, and others, the notional-functional approach began to take shape. This approach changed the emphasis in language teaching from a concern with form or structure to a concern with function. In other words, the curriculum was based on what one could do with language (linguistically)—for example, ask for help, state preferences, or make suggestions—rather than on the rules of grammar.

The United States had its own impetus for linguistic change in the 1970s with the arrival of almost 200,000 Indochinese refugees. The refugee influx forced the field to find ways to teach oral and written language to nonliterate learners who had previously been largely ignored because of their low numbers (Holt, 1995). When the field began looking beyond the survival needs of these refugees—especially those with low-level English skills and little previous education—notional-functional principles (Jupp & Hodlin, 1975) were adopted, and ideas from competency-based education were adapted and incorporated as well. The competency-based ESL curricula shared the aims of the notional-functional curricula in that learners were taught what to do with language. However, competency-based curricula stated language learning objectives in terms of what the student will be able to do with language in the real world, for example, read a want ad, follow directions in a manual, take a telephone message, or participate in a small group discussion at work.

How Does Workforce Instruction Differ From Workplace Instruction?

The curricula of the 1970s and early 1980s, although purporting to meet learner needs, were really reflective more of the workplace than the workforce. Surveys and interviews were conducted more often with employers, managers and supervisors than with workers or coworkers. Very often, the only employees who participated in needs analyses were those deemed outstanding at their work. And when employees were part of the process, they were usually asked *what* and *how* questions: "What tools, equipment, and/or work aids do you use in your job?"; "What do you do with the tools and

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equipment at the end of the day?"; "What do you do when the equipment fails?"; and, "How do you operate this dishwasher?" Questions such as the following that are also needed for language development—"Why do you think you have to follow such and such a procedure?"—were seldom asked.

By the mid-eighties, there was a new emphasis in curriculum design and classroom methodology in the field of adult instruction. This was a more humanistic trend, calling for the learner to be an active creator, not a passive participant in the learning process (see, for example, Bell & Burnaby, 1984; Fingeret & Jurmo, 1989). The curriculum became more of a flexible framework, where teachers and learners together identified and created the crucial ingredients that empower learners, freeing them to learn and grow. It became learner centered.

As the curriculum became more learner centered, the question was posed whether the goal of workplace language programs was to empower workers or make them better at their jobs (McGroarty & Scott, 1993). Advocates of workforce education favored empowering the worker and leaned toward worker-centered learning that addressed the needs of the whole person "to enlarge and enrich their capabilities as individuals, family members, trade unionists, and citizens" (A. Sarmiento, personal communication, January, 1997). Advocates of workplace education, on the other hand, saw a curriculum based largely on a needs analysis and a linguistic task analysis of the language and communication patterns of a particular workplace. While there may have been worker input into the needs analysis, the curriculum development process did not necessarily target those linguistic tasks that develop the whole person (McGroarty & Scott, 1993).

Over time, however, the distinction between workplace-centered instruction and worker-centered instruction started to blur. Most programs tended toward the middle, having become more sensitive to the worker, yet balancing the exigencies of the workplace (Gillespie, 1996; Grognet, 1995). Workplace ESL teachers had many roles to play and were accountable to many individuals and groups, among them the employers, the learners, and multiple funding sources. Frameworks developed by educators to describe the roles of workplace instructors demonstrate this complexity. Mansoor (1993) has created a detailed matrix illustrating the job duties, tasks, and subtasks, as well as knowledge, skills, attitudes, and other requirements for the workplace instructor. Lomperis (Jameson, 1997) has categorized her extensive framework around four steps needed to provide a workplace ESL program: marketing, planning, implementing, and evaluating.

What Linguistic Skills are Needed in the Workplace?

While there is comparatively a good deal of research on discourse in the K-12 classroom—teacher to student; student to teacher; student to student (see, for example, Goldenberg, 1991; Tharp & Gallimore, 1989)—there is very little on discourse patterns and style in the workplace. There has been research in England (Jupp & Davies, 1979; Garton-Sprenger, Jupp, Milne, & Prowse, 1980), and some work is currently going on in Australia (Candlin, 1995). In the United States, one linguist has looked at the sociolinguistic dimension of male/female communication in various milieux including the workplace (Tannen, 1986; 1990; 1997). However, there is no corpus of knowledge in the US that, through serious ethnographic research, charts worker to worker; worker to supervisor; supervisor to worker; or worker to manager communication in any occupational cluster.

Some educators (for example, Dow & Olson, 1995; Grognet, 1996; and Mrowicki, Lynch, & Locsin, 1990) have posited that a number of competencies do cut across occupational domains such as manufacturing, technical, service, and agricultural areas.

The following competencies, adapted from the sources above, can be classified as those that help the learner get a job, survive on the job, and thrive on the job. They are useful in any workplace setting.

To Get a Job

To get a job (other than through familial connections), second language learners need to be able to orally give personal information; express ability; express likes and dislikes; and answer and ask questions. They might also need literacy skills such as reading a want ad and completing an application form.

To Survive on a Job

To survive on a job, second language learners need to follow oral and written directions; understand and use safety language; ask for clarification; make small talk; and request reasons. If there are any manuals and job aids involved, they need to locate written information; find facts or specifications in text materials; determine the meaning of technical vocabulary and those enabling words attached to them like twist, stir, and pour; and cross-reference text information with charts, diagrams, and illustrations.

To Thrive on a Job

To thrive on a job and have job mobility, second language learners need to be able to participate in group discussions; give, as well as follow directions; teach others; hypothesize; predict outcomes; state a position; express an opinion; negotiate; interrupt; and take turns. On a literacy level, knowing how to access and use written information from diverse sources is essential.

What Workplace Skills are Needed?

In 1992, the SCANS Commission (Secretary [of Labor]'s Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills) issued a major report (U.S. Department of Labor, 1991). In the report, a group of business and education leaders identified five workplace competencies and three foundation skills needed for solid workplace performance. The assumption of the group was that all workers—whether native or non-native speakers of English, high school dropouts or PhD candidates—need to have these skills.

The skills and competencies were enumerated with the contexts in which they should be taught. Briefly, the five systems identified as workplace competencies are:

1. *Resource Management:* identifying, organizing, planning, and allocating resources. At all work levels, this includes resources of time (e.g., following a schedule); financial resources (e.g., making a budget); material and facility resources (e.g., knowing how much cleanser to use); and at a team or supervisory level, management of human resources (e.g., being able to meet both staffing needs and individual preferences).
2. *Information Management:* acquiring and applying necessary information routinely in job performance. This includes identifying, assimilating, and integrating necessary information (e.g., from a manual as well as from one's supervisor or coworker); preparing, interpreting and maintaining qualitative records and information (e.g., noting standards have been met on an assembly line or keeping records in an insurance company); converting

information to other forms (e.g., from charts to written form or vice versa); interpreting and communicating information to others (e.g., taking a telephone message); employing computers and other technologies for input; and entering and retrieving data (e.g., managing and monitoring robots on an assembly line).

3. *Social Interaction:* participating as a team member; teaching others new skills; serving clients and customers; influencing individuals or groups; questioning the status quo; negotiating to arrive at a decision; and working in culturally diverse environments.
4. *Systems Behavior and Performance Skills:* understanding how social, organizational, and technical systems work and how to function effectively within them; anticipating and identifying consequences; and monitoring and correcting performance.
5. *Technology Utilization:* selecting appropriate technology; and using machines to monitor or perform tasks.

The SCANS Commission listed three enabling or foundation skills workers need to be able to perform the five workplace competencies:

1. *Basic Skills:* reading, writing, listening, speaking and mathematics (with the recognition that *linguistic* skills in English are essential to the accomplishment of all the functional skills).
2. *Higher Order Intellectual Skills:* reasoning, creative thinking, decision making, problem solving, representing information, learning to learn.
3. *Motivational or Character Traits:* maturity, responsibility, sociability, and self-esteem.

Perhaps because of its timing—the report was released just before the Clinton administration took over from the Bush administration—the SCANS report received little attention when it came out. That began to change, however, when the composition of the U.S. Congress changed in 1994, and there are now indications that employment readiness skills are beginning to receive more attention in the adult ESL classroom. Professional ESL newsletters and journals are starting to publish articles on SCANS (see, for example, Jameson, 1996; Mingkwan, 1996). At the 1997 annual convention of Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) in Orlando, there were several presentations on the theme of integrating SCANS skills and competencies into the adult ESL curriculum. Further, a competency-based learner assessment system that is frequently used to satisfy funders' requirements for the adult ESL literacy program evaluation—the Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment System (CASAS)—has correlated its life skills competencies to the SCANS foundation skills and workplace competencies (CASAS, 1996).

How Can ESL Practitioners Teach the SCANS Skills?

Adult ESL instructors are often part-time employees who have limited interaction with colleagues, few opportunities for professional development, and little compensation for lesson planning time (Crandall, 1994). They frequently have learners with diverse needs and purposes for studying English (Weddel & Van Duzer, 1997). How can instructors tie their adult ESL classes to employment preparation while meeting learners' needs and curriculum goals? Brigitte Marshall, an educator in California, talks about infusing the general ESL curriculum with "workplace know-how" (Marshall, 1997, p. 1) through classroom management techniques, grouping tactics, and instructional involvement strategies that require learners to "make decisions collaboratively, solve problems, think creatively, and exercise responsibility as called for in the SCANS report" (p. 2). Gaer (1996), Jameson (1996), and Mingkwan (1996) give specific suggestions on how to integrate employment preparation with language learning. Their ideas are summarized and adapted below:

- Listen to the learners. Get a sense of what they want and need to learn.
- Identify relevant SCANS skills and competencies to be practiced in each lesson. Tell learners that they are, for example, gathering, organizing, and summarizing information and that these are skills needed at the workplace.
- Add related project-like activities to the unit being taught. The project context will enable the class to utilize many of the foundation skills as well as the workplace competencies. For example, in a unit on accessing community services, learners can write letters, conduct interviews, or invite guest speakers from local agencies such as the fire department, police department, or the public library. Learners should do as much of the project planning as possible. If persons are interviewed, learners can write the interview questions and summarize the findings. Then, the class should develop some sort of product from the activity (e.g., a booklet or chart that summarizes what they have learned about accessing services in their community). Point out to the learners that they are using language and skills needed at the workplace. For example, they are managing information (gathering, organizing, and summarizing information from a variety of sources), working as a team, and making decisions. To demonstrate how these skills transfer from one task to another, ask learners to give examples of other situations (on the job or in family life) that require similar skills and language. For project ideas, the extension or expansion activities in the teacher's guide from the program text or the curriculum may provide ideas.

What Else Should ESL Practitioners Do?

In order to be facilitators for adult learners, ESL teachers must understand how the workplace community thinks and talks. For that reason, educators need to listen to what business and labor are saying and doing, and look at how they are saying and doing it, and then talk with them. Current U.S. policy, coupled with the knowledge that the workforce of the future will require high-level communication skills, may be forces that make ESL practitioners look at their own discipline in order to make some radical changes in methodology for the workplace.

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